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The Shakespeare Garden Club

A FANTASY

—by—

Mabel M. Moran
of the
Larchmont Garden Club
Larchmont, N. Y.



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———— CAST ————

Ann Hathaway

Mistress Page

Mistress Ford

Lady Macbeth

Perdita

Cordelia

Desdemona

Katherine

Jessica

Portia

Rosalind

Juliet

Titania

Ophelia

Rosaline

Cleopatra

The Shakespeare Garden Club

A FANTASY

By MABEL M. MORAN.

SCENE: A room in Ann Hathaway's cottage at Stratford-on-Avon. Furnishing in keeping with the period.

(As curtain rises Ann is in the act of placing chairs, benches etc., in a semi-circle around the room; in center of circle is a long chest to be used as desk for the presiding officer).

Noise is heard at door. Ann runs and opens same. Enter Mistress Page and Mistress Ford,—with animated flutter).

ANN: Mistress Page (kisses) and Mistress Ford (more kisses). No finer sight ere greeted eye than you two dear ladies—nor never did I need you more.

PAGE: How now?

FORD: And why is this?

ANN: Forsooth, 'tis a meeting here to-day of the Shakespeare Garden Club—and like to be grave and solemn, so none better than you Merry Wives of Windsor to cheer me up.

PAGE: A meeting—a-lack-a-day—may we stay? We are not members.

ANN: Oh, you are my guests—and most welcome.

FORD: Do we know the ladies?

ANN: Nearly all, I trow, there's the President, Lady Macbeth.

PAGE: She was ever all dignity—and ambition.

ANN: And the Secretary is Portia, the attorney-at-law.

FORD: A-la-la, she'll make you toe the mark.

ANN: Jessica, Shylock's daughter, is Treasurer.

PAGE: No one dares owe dues to her, I'll warrant.

ANN: But sit you down, and have a merry gossip together. Methinks the ladies do arrive.

(Knock on door. Perdita enters, greeting and handshaking)

ANN: (Aside to wives as Perdita crosses stage and takes chair at end) You remember the Winters' Tale they told of her? (Wives nod energetically)

ANN: And here comes Desdemona, wife of Othello.

Enter Desdemona. (sits by Perdita)

PAGE: (aside) How could she ever have married that horrid black man?

Enter Cordelia.

FORD: I have never met her, she's daughter to King Lear, a cranky father and hard to please, but she's a lovely religious woman.

Enter Katherine.

PAGE: Why that's Petrucio's wife, the one they called the Shrew, she hath an untamed twinkle in her eye.

Enter Jessica.
(sits at table)

FORD: Shylock's daughter, she keeps him guessing I'll warrant.

Enter Rosalind.
(in man's attire)

PAGE: That must be Rosalind, she always did love the doublet and hose, but—as you like it—so do it, say I.

Enter Portia.
(Mortar-board and gown)
(Sits at center table.)

FORD: 'Tis Portia, the lawyer, and most successful. She'll win a case tho' it be for the Queen or only for a pound of flesh.

Enter Juliet.

PAGE: That's Romeo's wife, Juliet Capulet that was; for a run-away match I hear they're very happy.

Enter Titania.

FORD: There's a woman I cannot understand. She seems ever to dwell in a sort of Midsummer Night's Dream.

Enter Ophelia.

PAGE: That girl gives me the shivers, tho some say she makes a fine wife to that melancholy Dane named Hamlet.

Enter Cleopatra.

(Regally attired in Egyptian draperies)

FORD: My word! 'Tis well our husbands are not here, that woman is a vampire.

(Enter in numbers minor characters and take seats, much chatting, laughing, etc., until)

Enter Lady Macbeth.

(All rise and bow, she takes seat at center of table and raps)

The meeting comes to order.

LADY MACBETH: (rising and speaking with much dignity) Ladies of the Shakespeare Garden Club: We have a long and arduous meeting before us. Do I impose too much upon the milk of human kindness when I beg that the minutes of the previous meeting be omitted?

PORTIA: (Jumping to her feet) I do protest, Madam, there is no power in Stratford that can alter a decree established.

KATHERINE: How now! Must we listen to the law again to-day, Portia? Go to—let's get on!

LADY MACBETH: Oh well, what were done, when 'tis done then 'twere well it were done quickly. Madam Secretary—the minutes.

PORTIA: (reading) The 12th meeting of the Shakespeare

Garden Club was held on March 15th (interruption from a member) Oh the Ides of March! The Ides of March. (grows faint and is fanned by companions.)

MISTRESS PAGE: Poor soul, that is Caesar's wife.

PORTIA: (continues) The meeting was at the home of Juliet Montague and was addressed by Will Shakespeare himself, who hath told us in strong words of the unsightly condition of the banks of the River Avon. Willow trees uprooted, old rushes strewn about; broken flagons, and stray odds and ends of all unsavory things, even unto defunct felines lie on the edge of our lovely waterway, and it was urged by our most beloved leader that this Club take the matter in hand and clear away the filth and grow Plants, Flowers and Fruits along the river's banks. 'Twas moved by Desdemona, seconded by Rosalind, and carried that our Garden Club should attend unto this work.

LADY MACBETH: (rising) Enough! Thus thou must do, if thou'd have it, let us hear what our members have in mind.

PORTIA: Madam President, there is more to read.

JESSICA: Sit you down, Portia, and let me read my report upon the ducats in our treasury.

PORTIA: Jessica, thou art indeed thy father's child. Shylock ever thought upon the ducats.

LADY MACBETH: Ladies, enough of this. Ambition for our Club is our dear wish. Let's on with business. Who hath considered this matter and can name some fair flowers to carpet Avon's banks?

(looks about questioningly, a member rises)

Ah Titania!

TITANIA: Madam President, my suggestions come from realms of fairy land as I dream, half-waking, on a bank where the wild thyme blows; where oxlips and the nodding violet grows. Quite over canopied with luscious woodbine, with sweet musk roses, and with eglantine. I dream of pease blossoms and mustard seed and canker roses (tho some call them wild) and honeysuckle and ivy—which I trow is feminine because it requires support). I give you dew-berries and apricots, and love-in-idleness, and there is cupid's flower and Dian's bud, which is but an herb, but brewed will keep men and women chaste.

MISTRESS FORD: (aside) Best brew some for Cleopatra.

TITANIA: (continues) These, Madam President, are what I would grow on Avon's marshy banks. (sits down)

LADY MACBETH: Titania hath named a worthy list, let all in favor signify in the usual way.

(Members applaud and murmur "aye, aye")

LADY MACBETH: (looking about) Juliet, do I see you wish to speak?

JULIET: Madam President, Romeo says the plaintain leaf is most excellent for healing bruises, why not grow that? And Friar Lawrence knows many precious juiced flowers that kill the poisons of baleful weeds. Such weeds as the mandrake that shrieks like living mortals when torn from the earth. And surely we must have a pomegranate tree, for Romeo and I both know that the nightingale loves to sing in the branches, and the nightingale sings far sweeter than the lark.

JESSICA: Oh you romantic child, still thinking of your honeymoon.

LADY MACBETH: Ladies, your approval? (Applause and "ayes")

OPHELIA: (very timidly) Madam President?

KATHERINE: (aside) Have we to listen to Ophelia? Everyone knows she hath bats in her belfry.

ROSALIND: Hush, Kate, Hamlet hath changed her mind since they were wed, she's sane enough now.

KATHERINE: Hamlet and Petrucio must be of the same kin, Petrucio made me change some, forsooth.

OPHELIA: (in louder tones) Madam President.

LADY MACBETH: Ah Ophelia, speak up my child.

OPHELIA: Madam, I move we plant rosemary, that's for remembrance and a chosen emblem for weddings and funerals. And pansies, they're for thought, tho Madam Titania called them "love-in-idleness." Fennel, too, we should have, that's for flatterers, tho some say the gladiators mixed it with their daily food, to make them fierce and rude. Columbine is pretty, but it means unfaithfulness—and forsaken lovers—let's not plant that. Then we must have rue, for its other name is herb of grace—we all need that. And daisies, shall we plant those? They mean to "dissemble." But oh dear Madam, I pray you let us have violets—and violets and violets, for they mean faithfulness. (sits down)

KATHERINE: Madam President, I move we cheer Ophelia, she hath told us useful things. (Members—"Aye, aye, aye!")

LADY MACBETH: (Raps for quiet) Peace ladies, time passes, we must hasten, are there more suggestions?

PERDITA: Madam President—Now Jove give me courage, I do so tremble when I speak—we should plant lavender and mint, and savory, and marjoram, and pale primroses—fairest flowers of their season would show starlike on Avon's banks, while the flower-de-luce and crown imperial would rear their lily heads in majesty gainst the foliage of willows. We could also have carnations and gillyvors, tho I like them not.

(sits down hastily)

KATHERINE: Madam President. Perdita is so shy she will not tell why she likes not the carnation and the gillyvors, but I know 'tis because they both are streaked

with red and white and look like painted women.
MISTRESS FORD: (aside) Let's call Cleopatra "gilly" for short.

CORDELIA: Madam President.

LADY MACBETH: Cordelia has the floor.

CORDELIA: Ladies, I ask your indulgence while I tell you a short but sweet tale of the Crown Imperial. This flower, which we sometimes call the Canterbury Bells, was first made white and erect and grew to its full beauty in the Garden of Gethsemane where it was oft noted and admired by our Lord, but on the night of the Agony, as he passed through the Garden, all the other flowers bowed their heads in sorrowful adoration, save the Crown Imperial, which alone remained with its head unbowed, but not for long. Sorrow and shame soon took the place of pride, and tears and painful blushes followed, and so hath she ever remained with bent blossoms unto this very day. (Murmurs and nods from members)

MISTRESS FORD: (aside) Did I not say Cordelia was a fine religious woman?

ROSALINE: Madam President?

LADY MACBETH: Rosaline, my dear, I rejoice to hear you speak.

ROSALINE: Dear Madam, I recall a sweet song of my childhood, learned before I knew that sometimes Love's Labor's Lost. It paints a picture of springtime. (Sings)

When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks all silver white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight.

Surely this would apply to Avon's banks as well.

LADY MACBETH: Quite likely, child, 'tis a pretty chant, we thank you. (looks slowly around circle) Ah, Cleopatra, have you no suggestions?

(Cleopatra rises languidly and poses)

CLEOPATRA: Madam President, age cannot wither, nor custom stale the infinite variety of my memories of Egypt's bounteous blooms; but alas! They would shrivel and die in your cold clime. Would that you might see green figs grow, and ripe luscious olives. And Oh for a glimpse of the date trees on the Nile, or a whiff of the orange blossoms' perfume. Could you but imagine the beauty of the lemon tree heavy with golden fruit, or the loveliness of the lime. The dusky purple of Egypt's wine-like grapes lies ever in mine eye, and I dream of the wondrous green of the Aspic vine. Yet perchance that which I love most is the polished sheen of laurel leaves, for Anthony and I wore laurel chaplets on our brows throughout the year. (Sinks back into seat)

MISTRESS PAGE: My word, she treats us English like

30 farthings.

LADY MACBETH: My lady Cleopatra hath told us what we may not have.

OPHELIA: (rising hastily) Dear lady, let me tell you what we must not have, 'tis aconite, bracken, bramble and brier, burs, burdock and cockle, duckweed and hemlock, insane-root, nettles and opium. All these are evil things. Let's none of them.

(Members murmur and shiver)

PORTIA: The law would call this a process of elimination.

ROSALIND: Madam President, I speak for the greenwood tree, for trees are my delight. 'Twas but a while ago that I found a man haunting the forest and abusing our young plants with carving "Rosalind" on their bark. Hanging odes on Hawthornes, and elegies on brambles—forsooth deifying the name of Rosalind. I soon stopped that.

KATHERINE: Brave girl, what did you do?

ROSALIND: (laughing) I married him.

LADY MACBETH: Mistress Ford, have you a thought to add to our growing list?

MISTRESS FORD: (rising and bowing low) My lady, I thank you for your courtesy to one outside your club, and being a good housewife I would speak for grains. You should plant barley, corn and oats, rye and wheat. Then too, there's spices, ginger, nutmeg and mace—oh yes, and mustard, thyme and savory.

MISTRESS PAGE: (rising quickly) Dear Madam, I, too, am a good housewife, pray let me speak for what we can never neglect, good vegetables. There's cabbage and carrots, beans and peas, lettuce and mushrooms, and onions, garlic and leeks.

LADY MACBETH: Ladies! Mine ears are weighted with sounds of food. Pray let us not consider onions—garlic and leeks—or all the perfume of Arabia will not sweeten this little land.

CORDELIA: Dear Madam, I fear to annoy, but would the name of berries fall heavy on thine ear? We should grow some of these along the bank; say blueberries and blackberries, currants, and dewberries, gooseberries, mulberries and strawberries, and if we grow strawberries we must remember that our own King Henry the Fifth hath said: "The strawberry grows underneath the nettle, and wholesome berries thrive and ripen best, neighbored by fruit of baser quality." Are we humans like that, I wonder?

LADY MACBETH: (Turning to Portia) Madam Secretary, are you able to make notes—these thoughts come in thick and fast.

PORTIA: Aye, Madam, and I crave your mercy, and beg that the quality of mercy is not strained, for Ann Hathaway has asked that we leave not out of our dis-

cussion the trees that Master Shakespeare loves so well. If a suggestion from me comes not amiss, it would seem wise that our members now sitting in this half circle should try, as in our childhood games, to name the trees in order, alphabetical, each taking her turn according to the letter, what say you, Madam?

LADY MACBETH: Most admirable. Shall we begin at this end with 'Mistress Page'?

MISTRESS PAGE: Do I understand that I am to name all trees I canst remember beginning with the letter 'A'?

PORTIA: That is my thought, and when you have finished just tap your neighbor and she will start with 'B.'

MISTRESS PAGE: (Thoughtfully) Almond, ash, aspen, apple, that's all. (taps Mistress Ford)

MISTRESS MORD: Balsam, bay, birch, box.

(much excitement among members, all trying to think, etc.) (Much original business)

NEXT: Cherry, chestnut, crabapple, cypress.

NEXT: Elm and elder.

NEXT: Fig, filbert and fir.

NEXT: Hazlenut and holly.

NEXT: Lemon, lime and linden.

NEXT: Oak, olive, orange.

NEXT: Mistletoe and mulberry.

NEXT: Palm, peach, pear, pine, plum, pomegranate.

NEXT: Quince.

NEXT: Sycamore.

NEXT: Walnut and willow.

NEXT: Yew-tree.

ANN HATHAWAY: Will Shakespeare would love that game, and thank the players, 'tis a goodly list of trees to cast welcome shade on Avon's banks.

LADY MACBETH: Ladies, we may rest content, our meeting hath accomplished much, is there further discussion for our Garden Club?

DESDEMONA: Madam, my husband's friend, Iago, (tho I like nor trust him not) hath a pretty wit and hath likened us to gardens in these words: "Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners, so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop, and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills." (sits down)

LADY MACBETH: True, child, very true. Ladies, let me prophesy, that when our members have died, and worms have eaten them and Master Shakespeare himself hath become but ancient history—garden clubs in times to come will remember fair Avon's shores made lovely by your sweet suggestions.

CLEOPATRA: (languidly) Madam, I move we adjourn.
Curtain.

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